

"Everything is already in the room."

-- Laurie Carlos

I'd like to tell you something I've been thinking about.

A little over a year ago, I wrote the following description of my practice when applying for this program: "Combining real and imagined narratives, I document and script human interaction through observational writing, performance, video, and sound. I investigate the space between people, and the attempt to connect with one another across this undetermined terrain: a constantly changing landscape amid emotional, sociopolitical, and bodily or physical boundaries. Examining the play between reaching out and keeping one's distance in both intimate and everyday relationships, I require myself, as well as participants and audience, to be playful and vulnerable, while embracing the unknown outcome when our paths collide. Aiming to capture and elongate these rapid, fleeting intimate encounters, I carefully collage seemingly disparate information into a dense and rich construction, leaving space for the audience to insert themselves and form their own associative experience."

I should add that I mainly explore these boundaries between people by acknowledging, questioning, understanding, overthrowing, perceiving and thinking about our differences and similarities. I seem to have a need to be in constant dialog with people, even when I can't establish a connection. What continues to spark me on the one hand, are the conflicts that can arise in relating to people, and on the other hand, moments of connection between one or more people, provided that one also relates to oneself, introspectively. A moment in which time seems to stand still. Although I strive to document, re-enact, or make these moments happen, they cannot stand out and be recognized as such without their immediate surroundings: absence. In terms of content, the tension between these two is something I want to continue to investigate in the upcoming work.

The technical aspect in devising the work is based on new communication skills and presentation methods I've experimented with the past year. Although created in languages and media that I wasn't able to express myself in before, my methods were similar to how I've composed, collaged, edited and designed work in the past: collect data, devise system for order, recontextualize, leave space for interpretation.

For example, I constructed maps to enhance an exhibition experience with added scripted personal encounters; gave new life to a captain's 200-year old log via automated entries on Twitter; started a web-based essay that navigated around a seemingly never ending page; played records that were endlessly stuck in the final, repetitive groove; wrote small scripts that created a new design or poem every time the script was run; created an online, collaborative performance in which software was enacted by physical characters living inside a desktop computer; and I wrote letters to a computer scientist who didn't want to be found. I will touch on a few of these projects more in-depth in the next section.

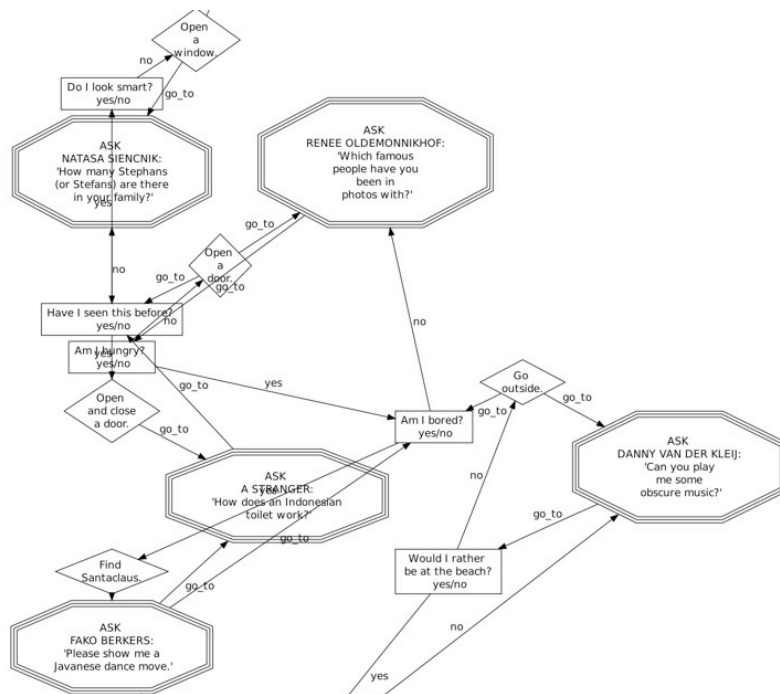
The final piece of the puzzle is more conceptual or editorial, namely connecting the moments, experiences, and fragments that shape the work. The coming half a year, I'd like to create an experiential environment in which various media come together to compose a non-linear narrative. For example, a sound sample could be followed by a movement elsewhere in the space, with characters in the story moving in between screens, perhaps set in motion by the audience. Work that is plural in its content, forms and methods, while together shaping a whole.

"It is as if you have entered an underground workshop (...) existing in an alternative universe. Sounds (...) enhance this atmosphere. The objects / experiments that occupy the cabin are more than a reflection of the traveler's obsessions; they are an escape route for the viewer into a forgotten world."

-- Janet Cardiff & George Bures Miller on the small ship they converted into an immersive environment, 2010

Selection of previous work

Random Personalized Exhibition Experience v.10.5.11 (2010/2011)



This project establishes connections between people to create unexpected narratives in an exhibition experience.

Based on various algorithms, a computer script connects three separate sets of data to one another, namely Actions, Questions, and People. The connections that the program forms between these nodes are random, and differ each time the program is executed. The results, or links between nodes and how they relate to one another, are processed by a graphic visualization software (GraphViz), and saved as a PDF. The links between nodes are visualized by an arrow, and each group of nodes has its own predetermined box or shape. The file is then printed onto paper. This map forms the base for the navigation of an exhibition space, in which People present on paper are also present in the space. The user of the map, the player of this textual game, is the exhibition audience. The player picks a point to start, and follows the questions and actions from there to create an individual experience.

Let's say you start at the action 'open and close a door.' After you perform the action, an arrow on the map leads you to the question 'Are you wearing two pairs of socks?' Answering 'no' then takes you to 'Ask Natasa Siencnik "How many Stephans (or Stefans) are there in your family?"', and so on. Although each map is different, the players are subjected to a predefined script. They are mere agents performing a

communicative routine through short interactions with strangers. The map offers an alternative route through the exhibition, encountering unexpected behavior such as people singing, refusing to tell you their full name, or admitting they'd save their computer should their building be on fire, not their cat.

Captain Tweet (2011)



Captain Tweet is a live twitter feed (twitter.com/tweet_captain) that I created for the HMS Weymouth, a settler ship traveling from Portsmouth, United Kingdom, to Algoa Bay in South Africa. The feed consists of entries in the travel log written in 1819-1820 by Captain Turner, the ship's captain, which I found on the site theshipslist.com.

On this ship, over 450 settlers including children left England to start a new life. From July-November 2011, the historical log for this ocean journey was blogged "live" via Twitter, the captain's 200-year old tweets being sent to the website in real time by an automated script. The feed includes information on the food reserves, the weather conditions, and the high number of dead bodies being thrown overboard, especially towards the end of the trip. All of this is presented within the generic Twitter interface. Each minute of the day, the script ran through the remaining list of entries, and there was a date and time that matched for that exact minute, the message was posted to the captain's account. As such, early 19th century events are seemingly being written in the present, a supposedly live log of what is happening out on the sea.

During the exhibition "No Such Thing As Repetition," curated by Inke Arns, Captain Tweet was displayed on a computer screen. The screen was rotated 90 degrees to accommodate the long list of entries on the Twitter page.

Dear Philip E. Agre (2011)

Dear Philip E. Agre is a correspondence project in the form of three letters to Phil Agre, a scholar and professor in information sciences. He was reported missing by his former employer UCLA in October 2009, and found and deemed safe in January 2010 by LA's Sheriff's department. He requested to be left alone, and disappeared again. A few colleagues who feared for his mental and physical health teamed up to search for him. They updated those interested through Twitter, Facebook, and a blog. Countless people expressed their concern by posting messages on the very networks he chose to abandon. After searching for him for over a year, a member of the group was able to talk to him in person in February 2011. Mr. Agre again expressed the desire to be left alone, to remain "offline."

The project departs from and reflects on Phil Agre's essay Writing and Representation, in which he uses examples of everyday behavioral routines to illustrate the way in which computation and communication technologies affect human interaction and privacy. Seeking to understand the subject matter better, and relate it to my own practice, I wrote him a letter. And another one. And another one. Herein, I meticulously describe brief, fleeting encounters with people in my daily life, and relate them to his ideas on the obsession to constantly upkeep our always present, digital relationships the way our always-on world requires. By approaching communicational, interactive activities, both improvised and routine, from a computational standpoint, I ask him if he thinks we could devise a mathematical analyzation using all variables involved in my previous encounters as a hypothetical solution to figuring out how to connect and relate to people.

The more I found out about Phil Agre's disappearance and possible whereabouts, the more I became aware of the multiple layers of the project. An effort to communicate with someone who doesn't want to be reached easily turned into a process of talking to myself -- through him -- to gain a deeper understanding of my own developing practice. Not necessarily expecting a reply, the letters provided space to philosophize about mathematical, computational, and interactive problems, through practical examples.

Inspiration & References

"At the heart (...) here is the desire for constructive and inventive thought, for a form of attention that struggles to articulate an intractable object, in the full knowledge that the everyday is always going to exceed the ability to register it." -- Ben Highmore, 2002, *The Everyday Life Reader*, p3

- * Ed. Jones, O. O. J. L., Moore, L. L., Bridgforth, S., 2010. *Experiments in a Jazz Aesthetic: art, activism, academia and the Austin Project*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- * Bateson, G., 2000. *Steps Toward an Ecology of Mind*. University of Chicago Press.
- * Highmore, B., ed., 2002. *The Everyday Life Reader*. Routledge.
- * Egmond, F., 2005, *Het Visboek, de wereld volgens Adriaen Coenen 1514-1587*. Zutphen: Uitgeversmaatschappij Walburg Pers.
- * Multidisciplinary performance work by Aki Sasamoto (Japan/New York)
- * Installations and sound work by Janet Cardiff & George Bures Miller
- * Theatrical and filmic play-within-a-play aspects of films like *Dogville*, *Synechdoche New York*
- * Gabriel Lester, *Suspension of Disbelief*, Boijmans van Beuningen, seen 2011 (ten new and previously created dealing with fate and magical thinking)
- * Omer Fast, Exhibition and publication, NIMk Amsterdam, seen 2011 (three complex video installations, centered around truth and fiction, individual and collective histories)
- * Elmgreen & Dragset, *The One & The Many*, 2011, Onderzeebootloods Rotterdam
- * Candice Breitz, *Legend*, 2005. (thirty channel video installation, recordings of Jamaican people simultaneously singing along to the record Legend by Bob Marley)
- * Loops in work by people like Marijke van Warmerdam, Phil Niblock, David Lang